Sakura no Sono

Yoshida Akimi

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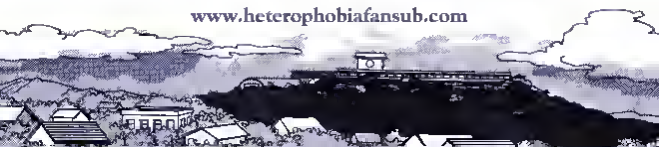
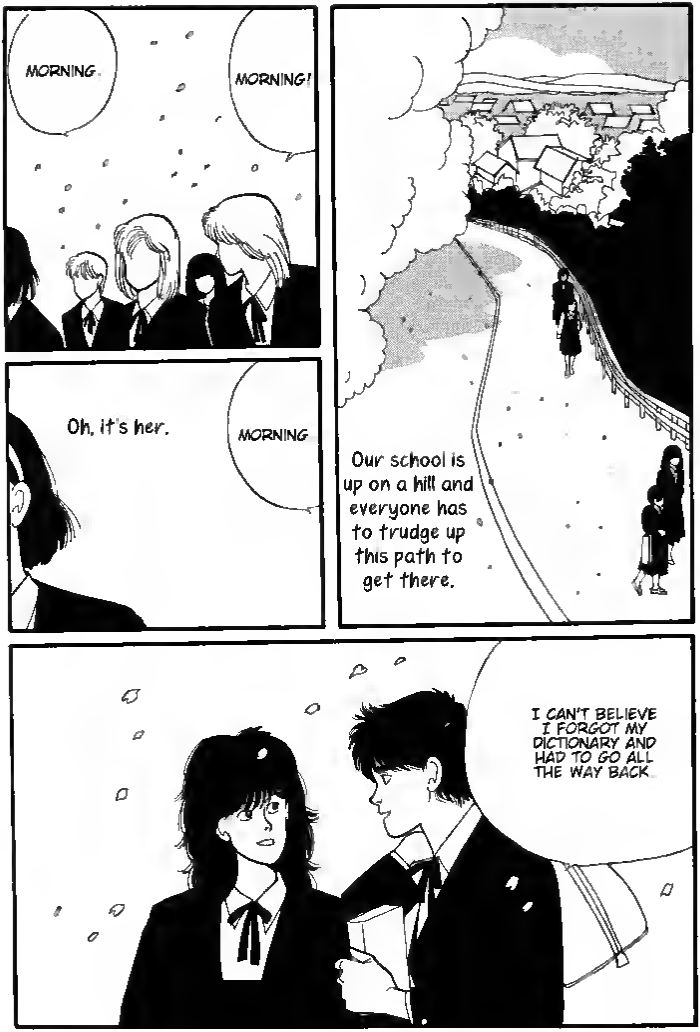


Drunk on Flowers

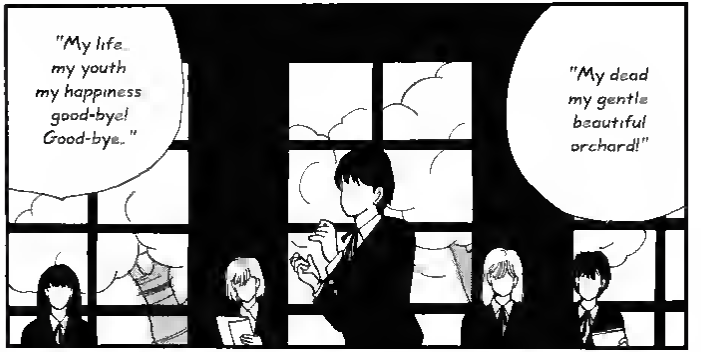
I hate spring.
The wind is too strong.


MORNING.
MORNING!
Oh, it's her.
MORNING
Our school is up on a hill and everyone has to trudge up this path to get there.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT MY DICTIONARY AND HAD TO GO ALL THE WAY BACK.

OH, GOOD MORNING.
MORNING
IT SURE IS WINDY.
No.
YEAH, THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS WILL ALL BLOW AWAY.
This isn't what I want to talk about.
SEE YOU AFTER SCHOOL.
BYE!

JEEZ!
Eek!
whoosh

The wind scatters the late-blooming cherry blossoms and stirs up my heart.

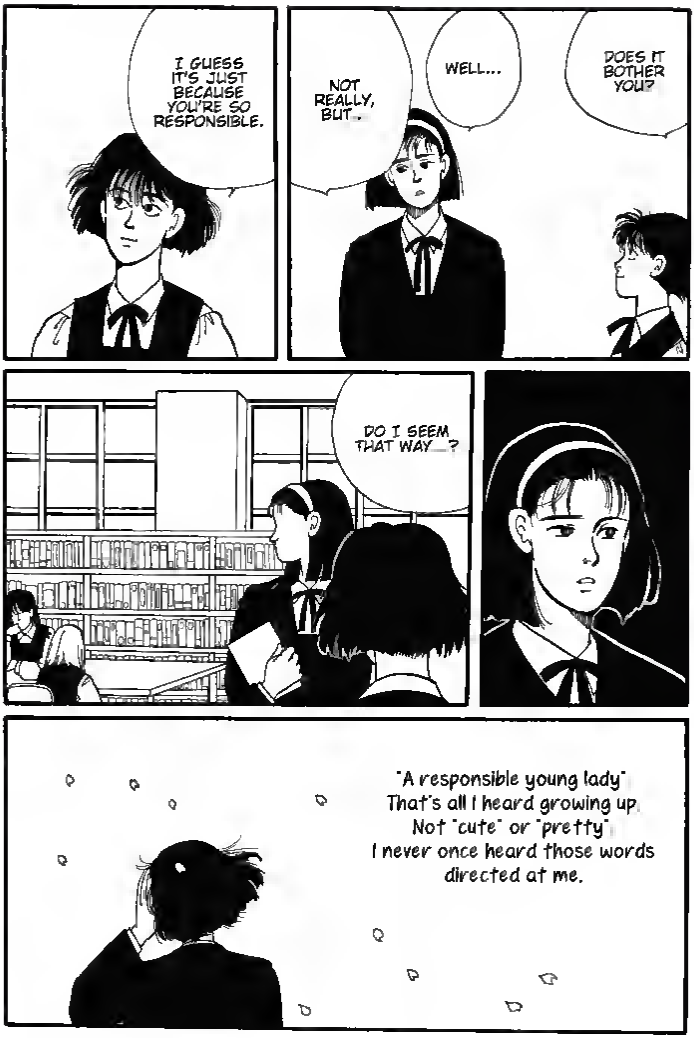

"My life... my youth my happiness good-bye! Good-bye..."
"My dead my gentle beautiful orchard!"

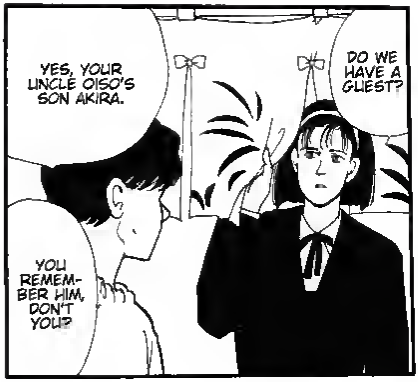
"To look at the walls and the windows for the last time. My dead mother used to like to walk about this room..."
"Mother...!"
AND NAKANO-SAN, ANYA'S VOICE SHOULD BE A LITTLE QUIETER, AS IF SHE'S CALLING FROM FAR AWAY.
I THINK WE SHOULD MOVE THAT CHAIR TO THE LEFT A BIT.
THAT'S IT, KURATA-SAN.
OK.

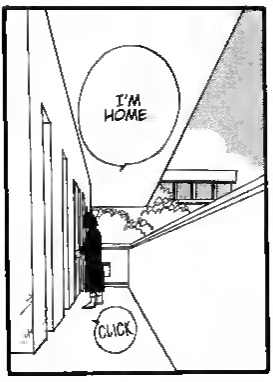
THAT'S NOT SOMETHING TO JOKE ABOUT.
STOP THAT, YOU TWO
WHAT IF IT'S NOT TRUE?
BESIDES, YOU SHOULDN'T BE CHATTING DURING PRACTICE ANYWAY
What? Really?
HEY, DID YOU HEAR SUGIYAMA-SAN AND HER FRIENDS ARE PROSTITUTES?
Maybe that's why everyone's so distant with me. I'm always lecturing..
Ugh, there I go being a busybody again.
SORRY...
OH, RIGHT...
I mean, I don't really like them either, but...
RATTLE

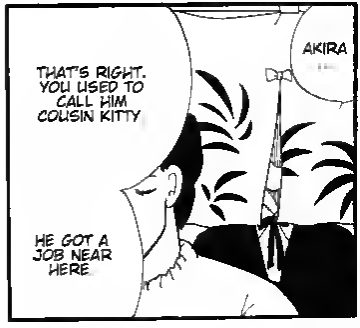
OH.
I'D LIKE TO CHECK THIS OUT.
OF COURSE
WELL, I AM A LIBRARY ASSISTANT, AFTER ALL, EVEN IF I DON'T SHOW UP MOST OF THE TIME.
I COULD SAY THE SAME, SUGIYAMA-SAN...
YOU'RE STILL HERE, SHIMIZU-SAN?
I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO STAND UP FOR ME... I FIGURED YOU HATED ME, I SKIP PRACTICE A LOT, AFTER ALL.
THANKS, BY THE WAY.
JUST WRITE YOUR NAME AND CLASS
SURE.

OK
ALL RIGHT, WELL, THE DUE DATE IS A WEEK FROM TODAY
OH... UH... IT'S NOTHING
WHY DOES EVERYONE SPEAK SO POLITELY TO ME?
UM... SUGIYAMA-SAN?
I MAY BE CLUB PRESIDENT, BUT WE'RE STILL IN THE SAME YEAR...
OH... WELL... I GUESS BECAUSE YOU'RE THE CLUB PRESIDENT ...
HUH?

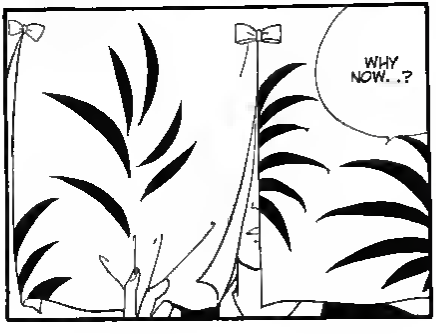

I GUESS IT'S JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE SO RESPONSIBLE.
NOT REALLY, BUT...
WELL...
DOES IT BOTHER YOU?
DO I SEEM THAT WAY—?
"A responsible young lady"
That's all I heard growing up.
Not "cute" or "pretty"
I never once heard those words
directed at me.



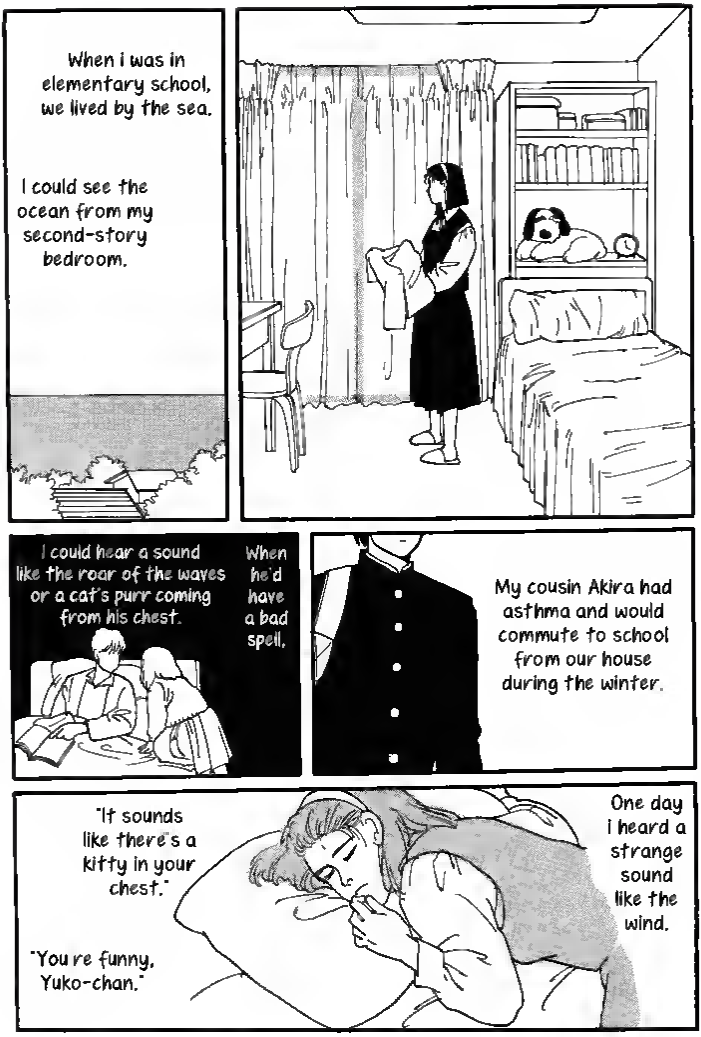




I had tried to forget.



OF COURSE
CLATTER
YUKO-CHAN!? WOW...YOU'VE REALLY GROWN! DO YOU REMEMBER ME?
WEL-COME
flick
CHILDHOOD ASTHMA USUALLY GOES AWAY AS AN ADULT.
HUH? OH YEAH, I'M FINE.
IS... YOUR ASTHMA ALL BETTER?
I SEE ..


When I was in elementary school, we lived by the sea.
I could see the ocean from my second-story bedroom.
I could hear a sound like the roar of the waves or a cat's purr coming from his chest.
When he'd have a bad spell,
My cousin Akira had asthma and would commute to school from our house during the winter.
One day I heard a strange sound like the wind.
"It sounds like there's a kitty in your chest."
"You're funny, Yuko-chan."

He was my first love.
DON'T YOU WANT TO VISIT WITH AKIRA-CHAN?
HM?
WHAT'S THE MATTER? WHY'RE YOU HOLED UP IN YOUR ROOM?
YUKO?

I WAS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BACK THEN.
YOU USED TO PLAY WITH HIM ALL THE TIME.
NO WONDER IT SEEMS LIKE I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO'S GOTTEN OLDER.
AKIRA-CHAN WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL THEN.
SO YOU WERE. IT'S BEEN SIX YEARS, AFTER ALL.

JOIN THE MANGA CLUB!
OH, THANKS.
I'LL COVER FOR YOU. WHY DON'T YOU GO GET SOMETHING TO EAT?
JOIN THE GYMNASTICS CLUB!
NOW TAKING APPLICATIONS!
Drama Club
I WONDER HOW MANY WILL STICK IT OUT INSTEAD OF GETTING BORED AND QUITTING.
I WONDER HOW MANY NEW MEMBERS WE'LL GET THIS YEAR
UM, CAN I SHAKE YOUR HAND?
SURE...
GOOD LUCK WITH "THE CHERRY ORCHARD"! WE'LL BE WATCHING!
KURATA-SENPAI!

SHIMIZU-SAN, WANT TO GET SOMETHING TO DRINK?
DON'T BE SILLY WHY WOULD I WANT TO BE POPULAR WITH GIRLS?
THAT ROLE IN DRAG LAST YEAR REALLY WORKED OUT FOR YOU
YOU'RE SO POPULAR!
SHIMIZU-SAN?
HUH? OH, SURE.
HM?
SHIMIZU-SAN.

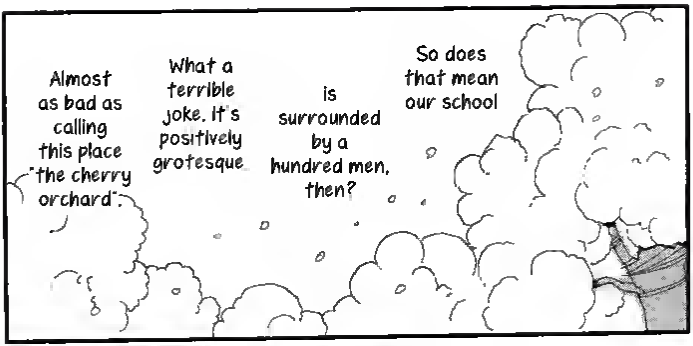
SHIMIZU-SAN. . YOU LIKE KURATA-SAN, DON'T YOU?
WHAT DO I MEAN ...?
...WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?
I MEAN JUST WHAT I SAID.

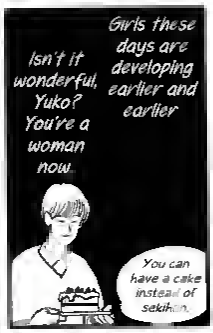
I JUST GOT THAT FEELING IS ALL...
SUGIYAMA-SAN, WHY DID YOU COME TO AN ALL-GIRLS SCHOOL?
HUH?
HMM... I DON'T KNOW IT'S JUST A FEELING...
WHAT MADE YOU THINK THAT?
I'M NOT ACCUSING YOU OF BEING A LESBIAN OR ANYTHING...
IT CAN BE PRETTY TOUGH FOR GIRLS AT CO-ED SCHOOLS WHEN THEY'RE ON THEIR PERIODS AND STUFF.
BUT IT TURNED OUT OK. I MADE SOME GOOD FRIENDS.
AND I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT BOYS THINK.
I WOULD'VE RATHER GONE TO A CO-ED SCHOOL.
WELL... MY DAD KIND OF FORCED ME INTO IT.

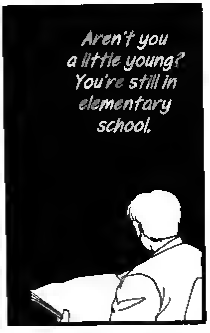
WHAT? HOW CRUEL!
ONE OF THE BOYS SAW ME AND TEASED ME MERCILESSLY
OH YEAH, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I DID GET A LOT OF FLACK FOR THAT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, TOO
SO THEY HAVE TO KEEP A SECRET STASH IN THE BATHROOM AT ALL TIMES.
THE BOYS NOTICE IF THEY TAKE A POUCH WITH PADS IN IT TO THE BATHROOM,
YEAH, HE WAS AWFUL.
WHAT A BRAT!
I HAD IT WRAPPED UP IN A HANDKERCHIEF AND HE TOOK IT OUT AND YELLED "SHIMIZU, WHAT'S THIS!?" IN FRONT OF EVERYONE.
YEAH, HE WAS CRUEL.
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE HIM.

BUT TO ME HE'LL ALWAYS BE
THE BOY WHO WAVED MY PAD AROUND THAT TIME
HE COULD GROW UP TO DO WONDERFUL THINGS,
"BOYS WILL BE BOYS" IS NO EXCUSE
YEAH, I REMEMBER BOYS LIKE THAT, TOO.
THIS ONE GIRL HAD PRETTY BIG BREASTS ALREADY AND THE BOYS USED TO SNAP HER BRA STRAPS.
THEY MADE HER CRY.
I'LL HOLD A GRUDGE FOREVER.
I'LL NEVER FORGET WHAT HE DID.

YEAH... I GUESS THAT DID PLAY A PRETTY BIG ROLE IN MY DECISION.
IS THAT WHY YOU CAME TO AN ALL-GIRLS SCHOOL?
THERE'S NO NEED TO FORGIVE HIM
YOU'RE RIGHT
THE SPIRITS OF CHERRY TREES ARE MALE
HEY, DID YOU KNOW?
WHAT?
DON'T TEASE
AHAHA, OH, SHIMIZU-SAN
IT'S TRUE CHERRY SPIRITS ARE MALE, THOUGH
YOU REALLY DO HATE BOYS, DON'T YOU?
cringe
HUH!?

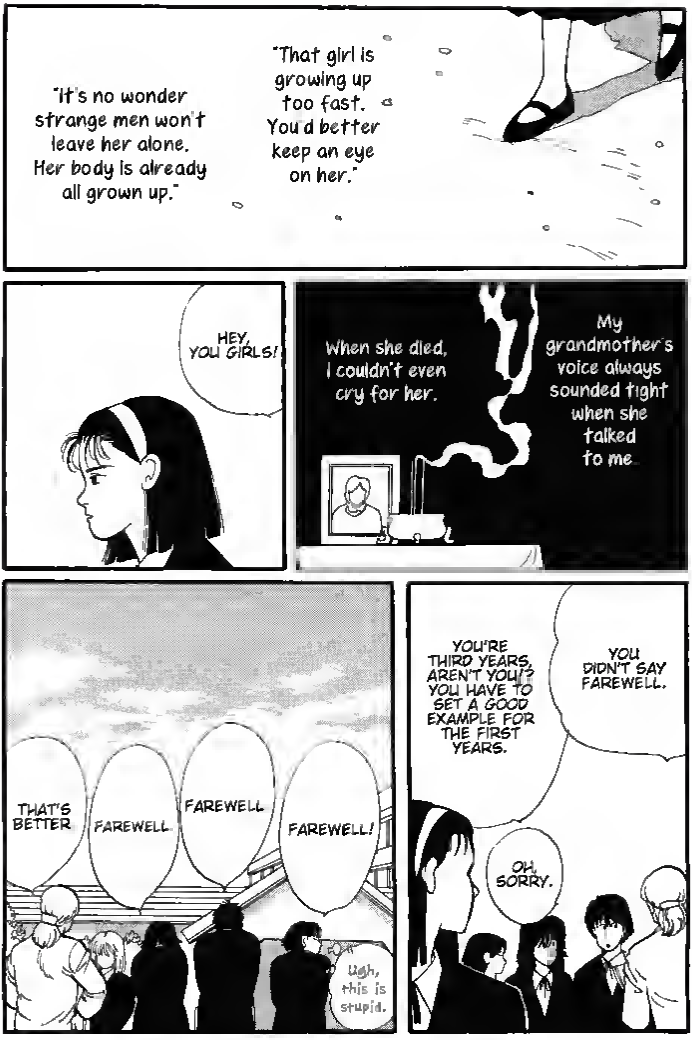

Almost as bad as calling this place "the cherry orchard".
What a terrible joke. It's positively grotesque.
is surrounded by a hundred men, then?
So does that mean our school


Isn't it wonderful, Yuko? You're a woman now.
Girls these days are developing earlier and earlier.
You can have a cake instead of sekihan.



My father looked at me as if I were an alien.

I was in 4th grade when it happened.

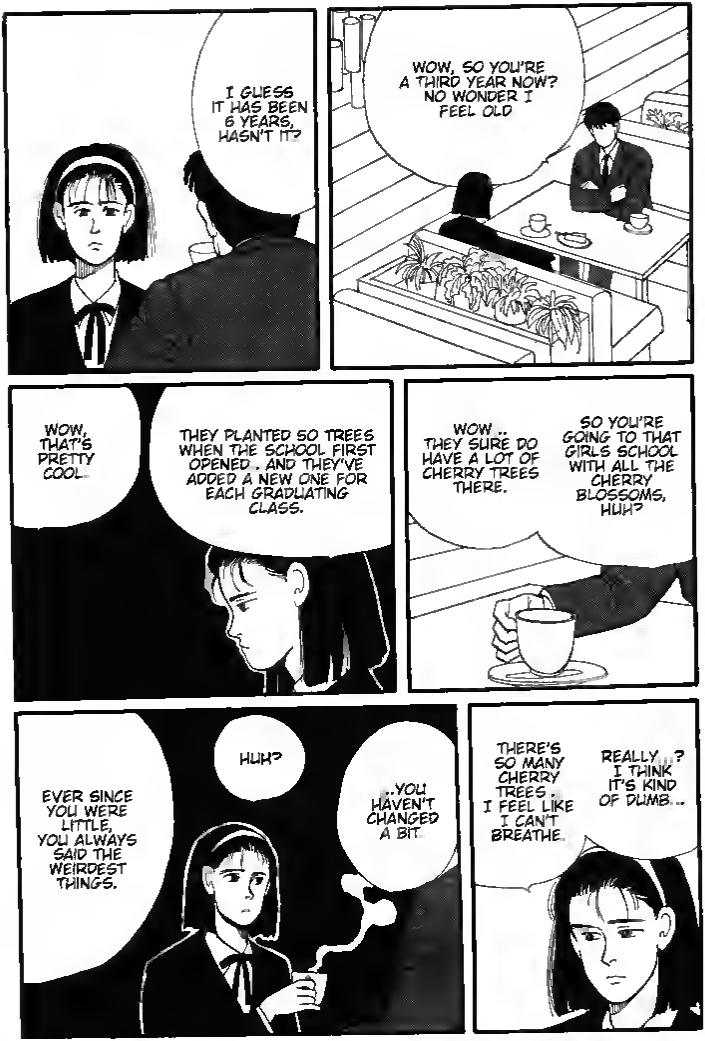

"It's no wonder strange men won't leave her alone. Her body is already all grown up."
"That girl is growing up too fast. You'd better keep an eye on her."
HEY, YOU GIRLS!
When she died, I couldn't even cry for her.
My grandmother's voice always sounded tight when she talked to me.
THAT'S BETTER
FAREWELL
FAREWELL
FAREWELL!
Ugh, this is stupid.
YOU'RE THIRD YEARS, AREN'T YOU!? YOU HAVE TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR THE FIRST YEARS.
YOU DIDN'T SAY FAREWELL.
OH, SORRY.

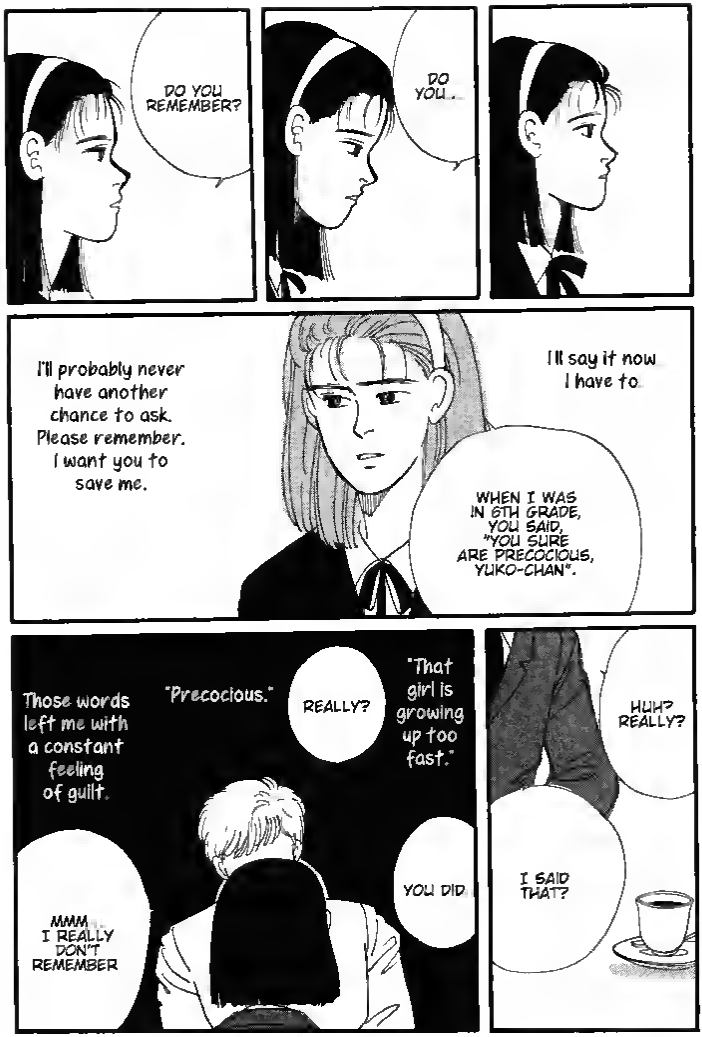
THERE'S NO ESCAPING IT NOW. IT'S TRADITION
SIGH... HOW LONG'RE THEY GONNA KEEP THAT UP?

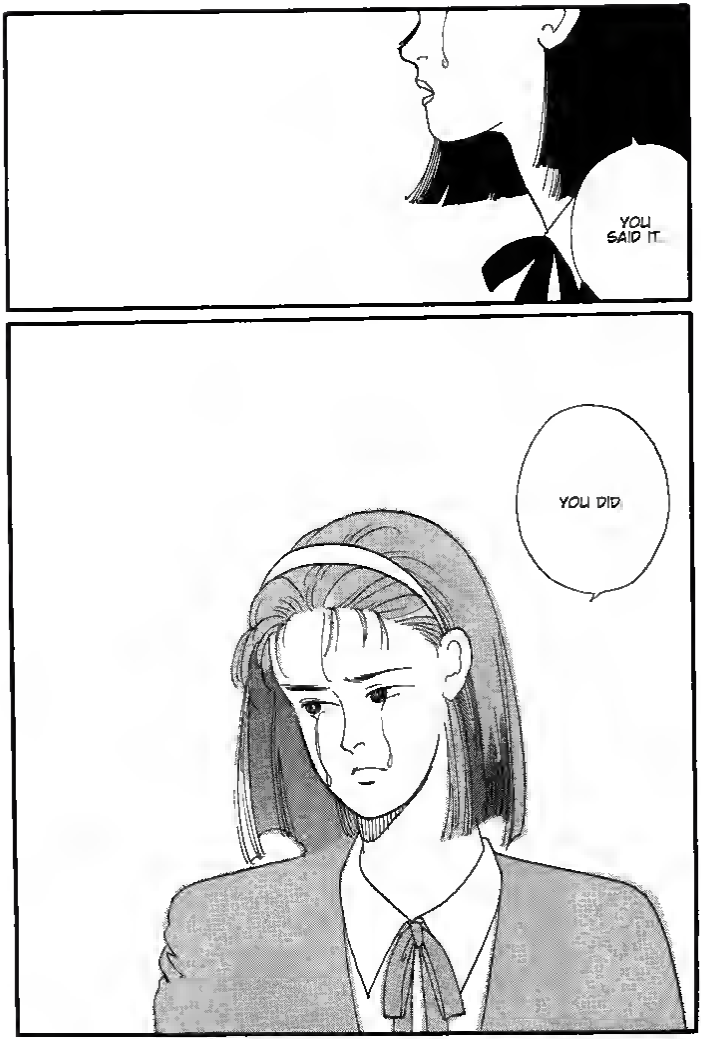
I realized that a while ago.

She looks like him around the eyes and mouth.

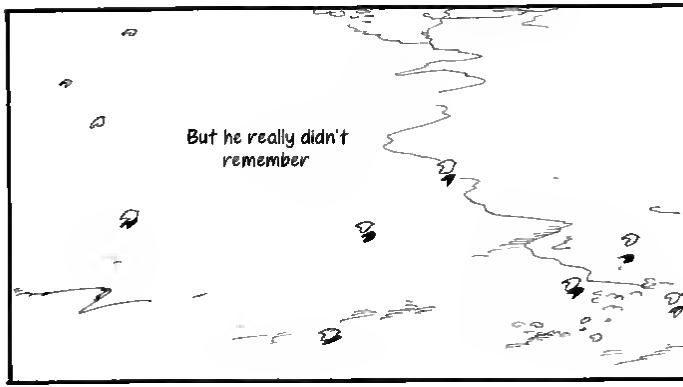
YLIKO-CHAN!
ARE YOU HEADING HOME NOW?
YEAH...
I'LL TAKE YOU UP ON THAT..
..OK
I HAD TO DROP IN AT ONE OF OUR BRANCH OFFICES NEARBY.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
WANT TO GET TEA? I'LL BUY YOU CAKE.


I GUESS IT HAS BEEN 6 YEARS, HASN'T IT?
WOW, SO YOU'RE A THIRD YEAR NOW? NO WONDER I FEEL OLD
WOW, THAT'S PRETTY COOL..
THEY PLANTED 50 TREES WHEN THE SCHOOL FIRST OPENED . AND THEY'VE ADDED A NEW ONE FOR EACH GRADUATING CLASS.
WOW .. THEY SURE DO HAVE A LOT OF CHERRY TREES THERE.
SO YOU'RE GOING TO THAT GIRLS SCHOOL WITH ALL THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS, HUH?
EVER SINCE YOU WERE LITTLE, YOU ALWAYS SAID THE WEIRDEST THINGS.
HUH?
..YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT..
THERE'S SO MANY CHERRY TREES . I FEEL LIKE I CAN'T BREATHE.
REALLY ..? I THINK IT'S KIND OF DUMB...


DO YOU REMEMBER?
DO YOU...
I'll probably never have another chance to ask. Please remember. I want you to save me.
I'll say it now. I have to.
WHEN I WAS IN 6TH GRADE, YOU SAID, "YOU SURE ARE PRECOCIOUS, YUKO-CHAN".
Those words left me with a constant feeling of guilt.
"Precocious."
REALLY?
"That girl is growing up too fast."
MMM... I REALLY DON'T REMEMBER
YOU DID
HUH? REALLY?
I SAID THAT?


YOU SAID IT...
YOU DID

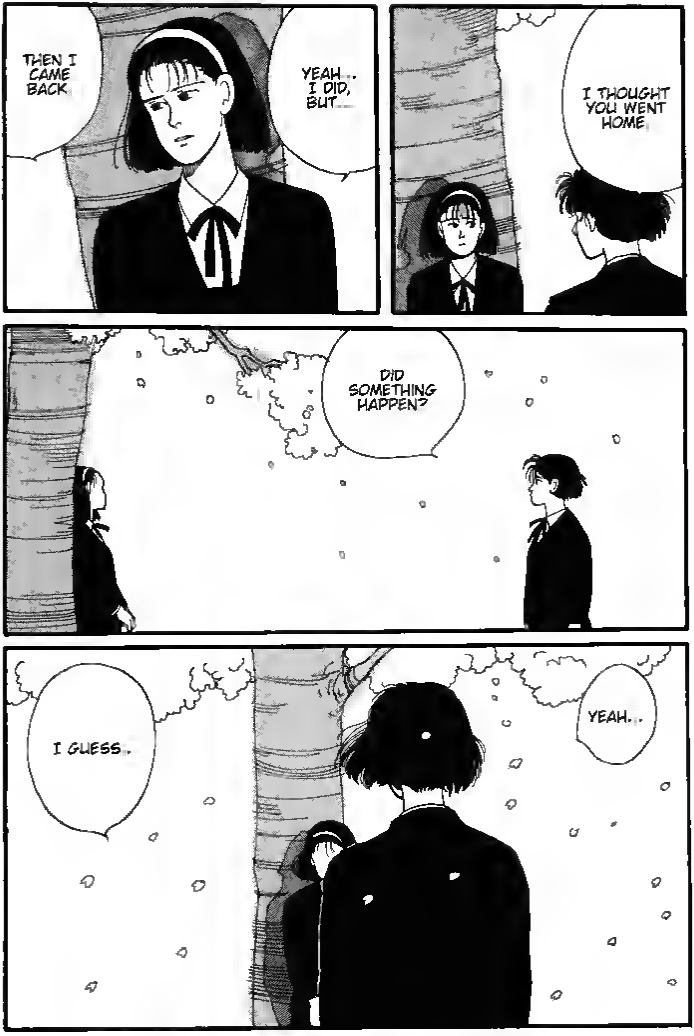
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
HUH? YUKO-CHAN?
JEEZ ..
I'd already kind of guessed...
SORRY, OK? DID IT BOTHER YOU THAT MUCH?


But he really didn't remember

All those boys and those men.
They'd all probably say they didn't remember.
But I can't forget.
My chest feels like it's being ripped open.
I bound my budding breasts and unconsciously hunched my shoulders as I walked.
Is it my own misery or the ache of my abused breasts?

OH, I SEEM TO HAVE COME BACK TO SCHOOL...
HUH?
HOW PRETTY...

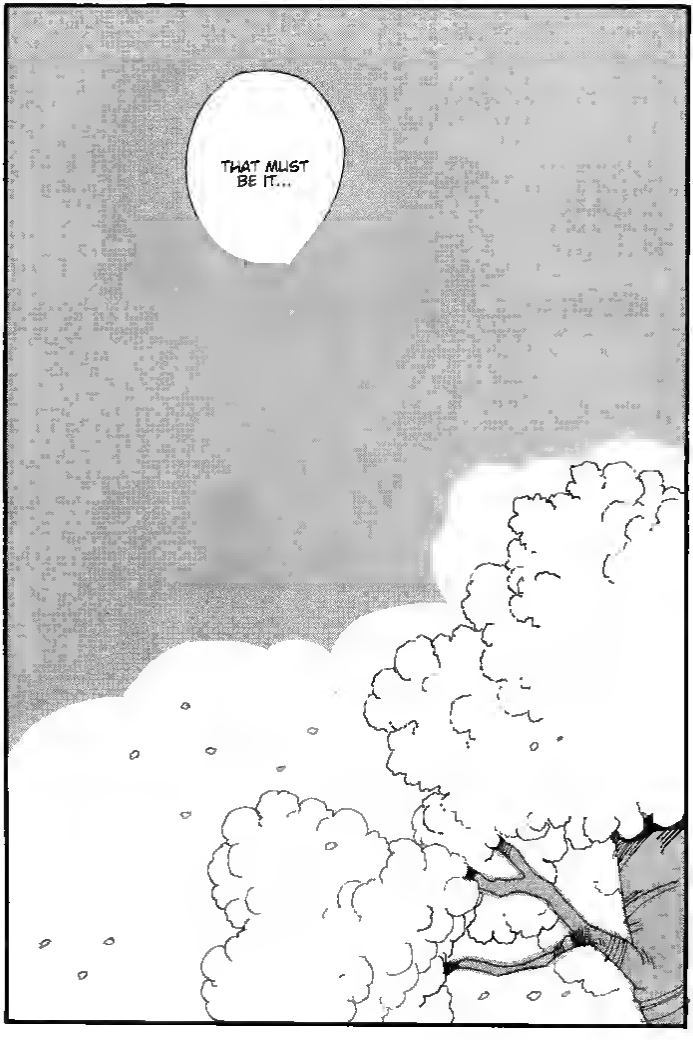
SHIMIZU-SAAAAN!
ARE YOU SURE? WHAT IS IT?
SORRY, YOU GUYS GO ON WITHOUT ME
MM, NOTHING IMPORTANT.
OH.


THEN I CAME BACK.
YEAH... I DID, BUT...
I THOUGHT YOU WENT HOME.
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
I GUESS...
YEAH...

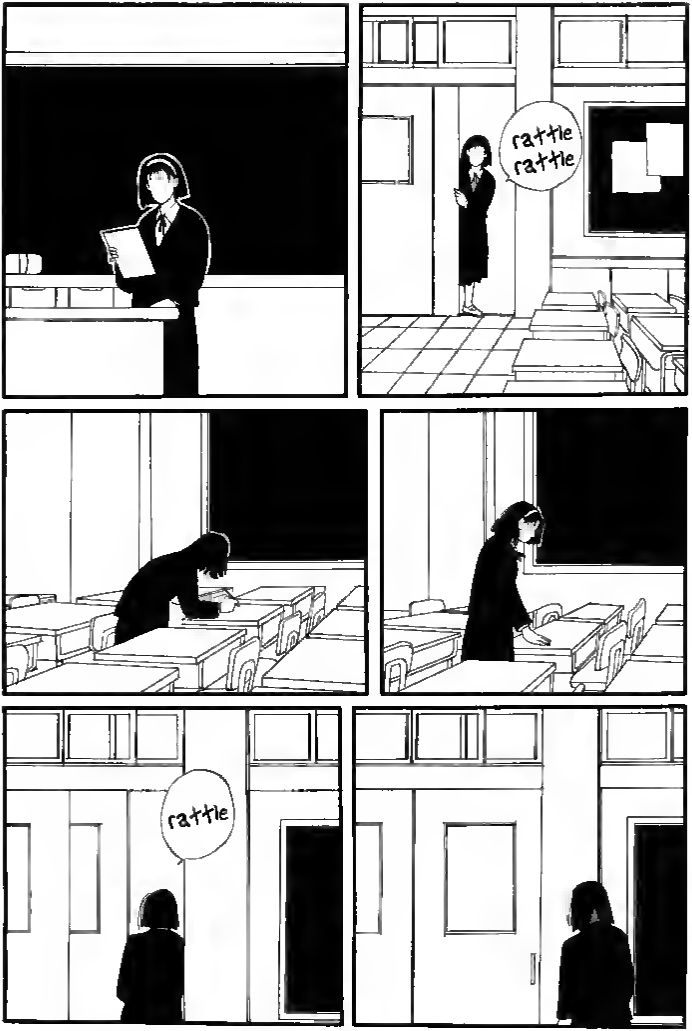
IT'S LIKE I'M DRUNK ON THE FRAGRANCE.
I LOVE THIS FEELING
HM?
SUGI-YAMA-SAN
SOON THEY'LL ALL BE GONE.
THEY'RE REALLY AT THEIR PEAK RIGHT NOW.
I KNOW.
YEAH.
TO BE HONEST, I DIDN'T USED TO THINK MUCH OF YOU AND NARUSAWA-SAN AND THE OTHERS

I COULD NEVER DO THAT.
MAYBE I WAS A LITTLE JEALOUS.
YOU USED TO BE A LOT MORE UNAPPROACHABLE.
YOU'VE CHANGED.
IN A LOT OF WAYS...
IT COMES WITH A PRETTY HUGE PENALTY, THOUGH.
I THINK I'VE CHANGED, TOO.
YOU THINK SO?
I'VE QUIT BEMOANING THE FACT THAT NO ONE RESPECTS ME. I JUST HAVE TO RESPECT MYSELF, THAT'S ALL.
I'VE DECIDED TO BE MORE OPTIMISTIC.

I SEE.
YOU WERE RIGHT WHEN YOU SAID I LIKED KURATA-SAN
SHE JUST DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A GIRL. I DON'T KNOW. THERE'S NOTHING FAKE ABOUT HER. I WANT TO BE LIKE THAT.
BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING,
SHE LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE I LOVED.


THAT MUST BE IT...

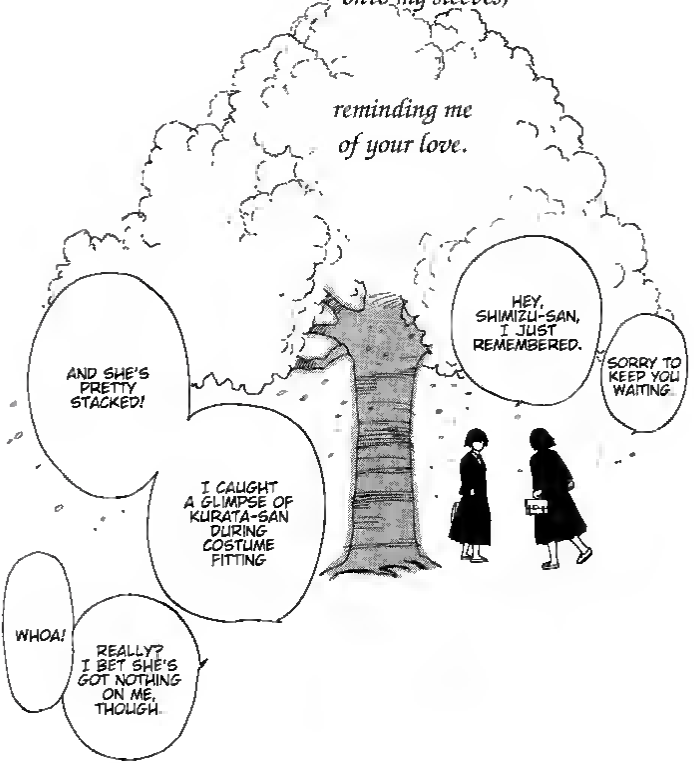
WHAT?
...OH, WAIT...
YEAH.
WANT TO GO GET ICE CREAM?
YEAH... KIND OF...
SURE. FORGET SOME-THING?
...HEY, CAN YOU WAIT FOR ME AT THE FRONT GATE?
HANG ON, I'LL BE BACK IN A SEC.


rattle
rattle
rattle

Scattered by
the breeze,

tachibana petals flutter
onto my sleeves,

reminding me
of your love.


AND SHE'S PRETTY STACKED!
I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF KURATA-SAN DURING COSTUME FITTING
WHOA!
REALLY? I BET SHE'S GOT NOTHING ON ME, THOUGH.
HEY, SHIMIZU-SAN, I JUST REMEMBERED.
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING.

Note: The poem is from the Manyoshu.